

OUTSMARTING THE GREAT OUTDOORS Strategies for Safe Summer Camping

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Two Utah children injured in separate incidents are recovering from burns they suffered after falling into campfires this month. These children are among dozens of Utahns who have been or will be hurt while camping and hiking this summer but most summer injuries can be prevented.

“It’s very important that families review basic safety guidelines before they head out on vacations, camping trips and hikes,” Trisha Keller, Manager, Violence and Injury Prevention Program, Utah Department of Health (UDOH). “We review the circumstances surrounding all reported serious injuries and deaths, and in nearly every case we find they could have been prevented with just a little planning.”

To keep your family safer this summer, the UDOH has the following tips:

Before You Leave

- Before you leave, let friends and family know your destination and return date.
- Take proper clothing and camping equipment; be ready for seasonal transitions and check the weather report.
- Carry a cell phone and make sure you have coverage where you’ll be camping.
- Have the campsite map with you all the time and study it before getting there.
- Give children a whistle and teach them to use it if they become lost. Help them to learn about landmarks and their surroundings and to stay calm in emergencies.
- Take emergency supplies like a flashlight, knife, rope, insect protection, high-energy food and water.
- Pack a first aid kit with bandages, antibiotic ointment, cotton swabs, oral antihistamines (Benadryl), one percent hydrocortisone cream and pain relievers for both adults and children.

Find a Safe Campsite

- Check the site for any hazards. Find a level site, close to a road.
- Find a safe fire pit far from your tent. Never leave your fire unattended.
- Teach children to steer clear of the campfire. Never let them play, roughhouse or run near a fire pit, even after the fire is out.
- Read all instructions before using a propane stove or heater.

Protecting Against Animals, Insects, and Plant

- Dress in long-sleeved shirts and pants. Wash any areas that have come in contact with unknown plants.
- Never approach or feed any wild animal.
- Teach your family to stay calm and call loudly or whistle for help if they encounter a wild animal.
- Keep your campsite free of food and garbage; use animal resistant containers.
- Avoid all wild berries and fruits.
- Wear insect repellent with DEET at dusk through dawn.

For the Hike

- Dress children in several layers of clothing. The inner layer should be a breathable, synthetic material that pulls moisture from the skin.
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater) 15 to 30 minutes before going out in the sun so it can penetrate. Apply frequently throughout the day, even in cloudy conditions.
- Encourage all hikers to drink water frequently to avoid overheating and/or dehydration. Remember, a child's body temperature changes faster than adults. (For more on heat conditions and prevention, see www.health.utah.gov)

Don't Make Light of Lightning

- The summits of mountains, crests of ridges, slopes above timberline, and large meadows are extremely hazardous places to be during lightning storms. If you are caught in such an exposed place, quickly descend to a lower elevation, away from the direction of the approaching storm, and squat down or kneel down on a pad, keeping your head low. A dense forest located in a depression provides the best protection. Avoid taking shelter under isolated trees or trees much taller than adjacent trees. Stay away from water, metal fences and other objects that will conduct electricity long distances.
- During a lightning storm, your crew should not huddle together, but spread out at least 100 feet apart. If one member of your crew is jolted, the rest of you can give assistance. Whenever lightning is near, take off backpacks with either external or internal metal frames.
- Since mountain thunderstorms tend to form in the early- to mid-afternoon, it's advised you do your hiking to the high peaks in the early morning, so that you can be back down when the thunderstorm threat is highest.

For more information, contact the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program at 801-538-6864.

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